

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

27 JANUARY 2014 - 1.00PM



PRESENT: Councillor Chambers (Chairman), Councillor Mrs French (Vice-Chairman), Councillors Mrs Bucknor, Hodgson, Miss Hoy, Stebbing and Councillor Sutton

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE: Councillors Butcher (until 1.35pm), Curtis (until 1.35pm) and Councillor Seaton

OBSERVING: Councillors Miscandlon (until 1.35pm) and Murphy (from 1.35pm)

APOLOGIES: Councillors Swan and Archer

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE: Jane Bailey, Gary Garford, Anna Goodall and Tom Lewis

*** FOR INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL ***

OSC26/13 FENLAND'S INFRASTRUCTURE INVESTMENT

Councillor Butcher presented Fenland's Infrastructure Investment Report.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Chambers stated that anything that can be done to upgrade the A14 will have considerable benefits to Fenland and Cambridgeshire. He added that the contribution of £800,000 is a minute amount compared the total cost of the project, and asked how the contributions from Huntingdonshire compare. Councillor Curtis stated that all local district councils in Cambridgeshire as well as a number of neighbouring County Councils are contributing towards the scheme. Gary Garford confirmed that he has a confidential document detailing the contributions, he stated that quite simply, the closer you are to the A14 you higher your contribution is. Councillor Butcher confirmed that this Council are looking for contributions towards the King's Dyke Crossing to be waved;
2. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that Councillor Melton made a statement to Council with regards to the A14 proposals, and although Councillors were able to ask questions they had not been given sufficient time to prepare. She added that the report refers to the number of people from Fenland using the A14 but includes no real data. She stated that this Council has faced and are facing huge cut backs and asked where are the statistics that show that Fenland will benefit from these improvements. Councillor Butcher confirmed that there was a debate in Full Council. Councillor Chambers stated that page 7, bullet point 2.3, refers to the figures for Fenland. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that this refers to 2000 vehicles per day, but would be interested to know who had carried out the analysis, and how the 2000 were identified. She asked how the sum of £800,000 was justified against 2000 vehicles per day;
3. Councillor Curtis agreed that 2000 vehicles per day are not a significant number but when that is multiplied by 365. Gary Garford confirmed that the traffic studies identified the vehicles migrating out from Fenland heading towards the A14, he added that we may be on the periphery which is why our contribution is lower;
4. Councillor Curtis confirmed that County Council have committed to a similar arrangement for the proposals relating to the A47 if it is to go ahead, as it fits into the bigger picture of the

County Council's work. Councillor Butcher clarified that no finances have been agreed with regards to the A47;

5. Councillor Hodgson stated that £800,000 over 25 years is not so hard hitting;
6. Councillor Sutton stated that group members were very aware of his initial response to the A14 proposals, but subsequently can see the benefits now that the amount has been reduced, he added however that he is concerned how it will be paid for. He feels that as the decision is being made by this administration, it should be this administration that organises the financing of the scheme; therefore, he suggested that the £800,000 should be set aside from current capital funding. Councillor Curtis stated that other authorities are looking at the benefits of spreading the cost over 25 years, using future funding like the New Homes Bonus. Councillor Sutton stated that by 2020 there may be different arrangements in place, the New Homes Bonus may be different, this administration should take responsibility for the decision they are making. Gary Garford stated that we will build this funding into the future budget plans; the payments will not start until the work starts. It will be more difficult to commit this sum from the Capital Programme as resources are limited, if we have the option to pay an annual revenue contribution with no interest over a period of time, that is the preferred financial option;
7. Councillor Stebbing stated that there are 7000 service personnel based at the Alconbury Airbase living in the surrounding community and the A14 is their main route to the base. Councillor Curtis stated that there is anticipated growth around Alconbury too. One of the big drivers is to create a ripple effect of the growth in the City out to the rest of the County, this will make it more attractive to businesses;
8. Councillor Mrs Bucknor confirmed that she understands the confidential nature of the document detailing the contributions to be made by other authorities but would appreciate seeing the amounts involved. She stated that the A14 is 45 miles from Wisbech, the population of Fenland is approximately 96,000, and she does not feel comfortable that this contribution is based on just 2000 vehicles a day. She added that we were not asked to contribute towards the guided busway, we do not benefit from the improved bus services and train services. She confirmed that she can see the benefits of this scheme, but not for Fenland and therefore cannot support the proposals. Councillor Curtis confirmed that nobody was asked to contribute towards the guided busway as this project was almost entirely funded by Government funding. He stated that there is a lot going on right now to benefit Wisbech, this scheme fits into the bigger picture for Cambridgeshire;
9. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she is looking at the proposal from the point of view of the people in Fenland who are feeling 'hard pressed'. She added that this is a weak report to argue the case to make such a large financial contribution when this Council are making staff redundant;
10. Councillor Miss Hoy stated that she is pleased to see that we will no longer be making a contribution towards the King's Dyke Crossing. She stated that the contribution towards the A14 scheme was reduced from £1m to 800,000 to reflect the fact that Wisbech would not really benefit, so feels that this has already been recognised;
11. Councillor Butcher agreed that there could have been a little more detail in the report, he asked Councillor Mrs Bucknor if she would have been happy to make no contribution to the A14 but to contribute £1m towards the King's Dyke Crossing. Councillor Mrs Bucknor confirmed that she has given no consideration to this and does not have enough information to make a decision on that;
12. Councillor Curtis stated that just because something is not as close to something else it does not mean that it will have no benefit, these proposals will benefit the whole of Fenland;
13. Councillor Sutton stated that the former Finance Portfolio Holder agreed a deal for £1m, it was argued that there would be more benefit to the south than the north of Fenland and therefore was reduced to £800,000;
14. Councillor Seaton stated that he understands Councillor Mrs Bucknor's passion for Wisbech, but she is a Fenland District Councillor and this is an issue that is greater than just Wisbech, it affects the whole of Fenland.

Members agreed that the Fenland Infrastructure Investment Report be considered by Cabinet and Council on 27 February 2014.

(Councillor Mrs Bucknor requested it be noted that she did not agree)

OSC27/13 PROPOSED ACQUISITION OF LAND - WISBECH

Councillor Seaton presented the Proposed Acquisition of Land - Wisbech Report making the following statement:

Part 4, Schedule 16 of the Constitution outlines that consent from the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny is required if a decision is deemed urgent and confidential and cannot therefore be subject to the required 28 day consultation period via the forward plan. The justification for urgency on this occasion was the need for continued complex negotiations with the Ministry of Justice, Cambridgeshire Police and Fire Service to run until the last moment prior to Cabinet in order to attempt to achieve a satisfactory outcome for FDC to underpin the land acquisition. The multi-partner and confidential nature of the negotiations meant that it was not possible to comply with the 28 day requirement for such a key decision and as such the Chairman's consent was sought to enable matters to be progressed.

Councillor Chambers reminded members that they are considering the principal of the urgent decision being made by the Chairman not the decision made from that item.

Members asked questions, made comments and received responses as follows:

1. Councillor Mrs Bucknor stated that she understood that originally 3 reports had gone to Cabinet, the courthouse, the police station and the land behind. Gary Garford confirmed that only one report was considered by Cabinet related to this matter covering the Courthouse and Police Station;
2. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked if the problems had been with the Ministry of Justice. Councillor Seaton reminded Councillor Mrs Bucknor that it is just the urgency of the decision that we are discussing today not the details of the actual report;
3. Councillor Mrs Bucknor asked for clarification why Councillor Seaton was the lead on this item, stating that there are a number of Cabinet members who are property developers, was there a conflict of interest. Councillor Seaton confirmed that he is the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Development and leads on the Nene Waterfront Regeneration project and it is for this reason that he is the lead on this item;
4. Councillor Chambers reiterated that we are not discussing the decision that was made. Gary Garford confirmed that we have to report the fact that an urgent matter was agreed by the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny to the panel, but we are not here to discuss that matter today, he added that it is only in exceptional circumstances that we have to do this, and we are reporting that fact to this panel;
5. Councillor Mrs French stated that for clarification Councillor Mrs Bucknor might find it useful to have a confidential conversation with Councillor Seaton following this meeting as it appears that she has some questions to ask relating to the original decision. Councillor Seaton agreed.

Members noted the decision of the Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny to consent to the urgent consideration of the above confidential report to the meeting of Cabinet on 23 January 2014.

1.50pm

Chairman